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RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0913
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER; STATE FOR NEA/RA, NEA/IPA,
NEA/ELA

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HIZBALLAH'S STRONG CRITICISM OF ANNAPOLIS
MAKES SOME WONDER

REF: A. STATE 156471

[1](#)B. TEACH-SOMERSET 11/24 TELCALL

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b)
and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) During a round of meetings the Ambassador had on November 23 and 24 focused on the presidency crisis, a number of Lebanese interlocutors expressed surprise about Hizballah's November 23 statement which carried particularly pointed criticism of the Annapolis Conference and Lebanese participation. It surprised people that Hizballah was so strong when its ally Syria has supposedly just accepted an invitation to Annapolis. PM Siniora's chief aide Mohamed Chatah wondered if this reflected a split between Hizballah and Syria. Is Syria shifting? Is there a rift between Syria and Hizballah's sponsors Iran? Chatah wondered. UN Special Envoy for Lebanon Geir Pederson, who regularly sees Hizballah, did not think so; he called the statement a sign of a division of labor between Iran and Syria, with Hizballah being used to convey the Iranian message about Annapolis.

[1](#)2. (C) The Hizballah statement slammed the "illegitimate and unconstitutional" Lebanese government for seeking to "keep the government of the Zionist enemy afloat, dictate conditions on the Palestinians ... and thwart the Palestinians right of return to their homeland". Whether it reflected some split with Syria or not, the statement was an opportunity for Hizballah to criticize the cabinet of PM Siniora just after the cabinet acquired the powers of the presidency from Hizballah's ally, president Emile Lahoud. Lahoud's term ended at midnight November 24 and, with no successor chosen, presidential powers passed (peacefully) to the cabinet.

[1](#)3. (C) On the day the statement was released, the Siniora government decided to upgrade its representation in Annapolis and will now send Acting Foreign Minister Tariq Mitri to head the Lebanese delegation. (Note. We sent information about Mitri and his itinerary to NEA/ELA on November 24. End note.) Some interlocutors, including Chatah and MP Saad Hariri, mused that Hizballah's harsh words against Annapolis were setting the stage for rhetorical attacks against the cabinet for sending a delegation.
FELTMAN